



Al-Risala 1984

August

Editorial

In December 1982, an international Islamic conference was held in Tripoli. The President of the Islamic Centre, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, was one of the participants. Among the delegates to the conference was a Japanese civil servant, who had converted to Islam. His Muslim name was Ali Abe, and he lives in Tokyo.

During a conversation with Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Ali Abe noted what great opportunities there were for preaching Islam in modern Japan. The Japanese, he pointed out, are straightforward and realistic people, completely free of prejudice. This enables them to look at every matter objectively. "The Japanese are potentially Muslims," he said. He was certain that, if the Japanese were to come into contact with the true Islam, then its simplicity and spontaneity would appeal to them and many would take it as their faith.

The points which Ali Abe made about the Japanese are the result of their scientific attitude. This is not a characteristic of the Japanese alone; it can be found in most nations which have benefited from the scientific revolution. The truth is that all "scientific societies" of the modern age consist of "potential Muslims". Islam has only to be presented to them in its true light for them to realize their Islamic potential.

Science, by its very nature, enables people to look at things objectively. Scientific study is based upon objectivity; to accept what is real is the motto of science: no scientific research or experiment can yield results if it is not conducted in an objective manner.

When a person is imbued with this scientific temper, then it does not remain confined to the laboratory or the workshop; it becomes integrated into his overall character. Such a person will look for an authentic religion – one preserved in its original, pristine form. When he surveys all the religions of the world objectively, he will find that Islam is the only such religion; other faiths have been corrupted by alterations and interpolations.

The scientific revolution is, then, a great blessing for Islam, for it has endowed millions with the objectivity to see Islam as the only authentic religion, and convert their Islamic potential into a reality.

The Message of the Qur'an

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Chapter 2.

"Children of Israel, remember the favours I have bestowed upon you. Keep your covenant, and I will be true to mine. Me you must fear. Have faith in my revelations, which confirm your Scriptures, and do not be the first to deny them. Do not sell My revelations for a paltry price and guard yourselves from Me. Do not confound truth with falsehood, nor knowingly hide the truth. Attend to your prayers, pay the poor-due, and bow down with those that bow down. Would you enjoin righteousness on others and forget it yourselves? Yet you read the Scriptures. Have you no sense? Fortify yourselves with patience and prayer. This may indeed be an exacting discipline, but not to the devout, who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return. (40-46)

The greatest favour that God bestows upon a people is to send His Prophet to them, thus opening for them the road to eternal salvation. Before the Prophet Mohammad – the last of the Prophets – this favour was the privilege of the Children of Israel. Soon, however, their religion ceased to be a conscious discovery of their own, and deteriorated into a set of rituals passed on from one generation to the next. With the coming of the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, the reality came to light. Those who still had a feeling for truth recognized the veracity of his prophethood and followed him. But those for whom religion had become a hereditary tradition did not recognize the truth when they heard it; they rejected it and turned against the Prophet.

In the face of clear prophecies of the coming of the Arab Prophet in the Torah, it was not difficult for the Jews to recognize the truth of his prophethood and believe in him; but belief in him was not in their worldly interests. An ecclesiastical structure had developed over hundreds of years, in which Jews held pride of place. People looked to them, the successors of saints and prophets, for spiritual leadership. People paid tribute and presented offerings to them all the year round. It appeared to them that if they accepted the Arab Prophet, their privileged religious position would come to an end; their whole profit structure would be demolished.

The Jews were considered representatives of revealed religion in the Arab world. People used to ask them about the Prophet Mohammad. They would say something in an innocuous manner, to turn people away from the Prophet and his mission. They used to preach to people, exhorting them to follow the truth and live their lives according to it; in practice, however, they failed to believe when their turn came to do so.

When a positive response to the call of God means demolishing the structure on which one has based one's life, when it involves relinquishing positions of high honour and prestige, then those who have gained religious rank through worldly glory find it extremely difficult. For the truly devout, however, these things are no hindrance. The fulfillment that others find in worldly pleasures, true believers find in remembering God, in spending for His cause, in obeying His commandments and being steadfast in His path. They know well that it is God's punishment that is to be feared, not worldly loss.

"Children of Israel, remember the blessing I have bestowed on you, and that I have exalted you above the nations. Guard yourselves against the day when no soul can avail another in the least; when neither intercession nor ransom shall be accepted from it, nor will they be helped. Remember how We delivered you from Pharaoh's people who had oppressed you cruelly, slaying your sons and sparing your women. Surely that was a great trial from your Lord. We parted the sea for you and, taking you to safety, drowned Pharaoh's men before your very eyes. We made a covenant with Moses over forty nights, but in his absence you took up the calf and worshipped it, thus committing evil. Yet after that We pardoned you, so that you might give thanks. And recall when we gave Moses the Scriptures and knowledge of right and wrong, so that you might be rightly guided; and when Moses said to his people: 'You have wronged yourselves, my people, in worshipping the calf. Turn in repentance to your creator and slay the culprits among you. That will be best for you in His sight.' And He relented towards you. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful. And when you said to Moses; 'We will not believe in you until we see God with our own eyes,' a thunderbolt struck you whilst you were looking on. Then We raised you after your death, so that you may give thanks. We caused the clouds to cast their shadow over you and sent down for you manna and quails, saying: 'Eat of the good things We have given you.' Indeed they did not wrong Us, but they wronged themselves." (47-57)

The Jews were favoured by God. He selected them for a special task: They were to receive God's Scriptures and pass His commandments on the rest of mankind. In relation to this office, they were granted many other blessings and facilities: victory over their enemies, forgiveness of their sins, special help in times of peril, divine provision for their physical needs and so on. This misled later generations of Jews into thinking that they were God's chosen people, and were assured of salvation in the next world. But salvation is a matter between the individual and God; such matters are not hereditary. Latter generations are not judged individually. On the Day of judgement people will be judged according to their actions. To think that anything other than good deeds will avail one then is to underestimate the rigours of that day.

True piety is to worship God alone, to believe in Him though one has not seen Him, to live in fear of Judgement-day, to subsist on the pure things of the earth, to prevent whomsoever one can from falling into sin. It is those who adopt this way of life who will be successful in the next world.

5 August 1984

A perfectionist is never satisfied with his work

George Orwell was the author of 1984, a projection of ominous trends he perceived in the world of 1948. Within one year the book had sold 400,000 copies and was being hailed as one of the classics of modern literature. Sales have not dipped since. 1984 has achieved a mass popularity that few books can claim. The New American Library paperback edition alone totals 10 million copies in print. But Orwell was not satisfied with this, his final and most monumental effort. "I am not pleased with the book," he wrote to his publisher. In the 16 years between 1932 and 1948, Orwell had written a dozen books and 700 essays and newspaper articles. During that time, he said, there was "not one day in which I did not feel like I was idling."

5 August 1984

Thoughts of the torments of the next world make one disinterested in everything

Abu Darda was a merchant before accepting Islam. He gave up his trade after becoming a Muslim. "By the One who possesses Abu Darda's soul," he once said, "I would not even like to have a shop at the gate of the mosque, not to be missing even one prayer, and to be giving the 40 dirhams that I earn every day to charity for God's cause." "What has made you feel this way?" he was asked, "The torment of the Day of Judgement," he replied.

Muhammad: The Prophet of Revolution

Part I

Chapter II

The emergence of the Prophet Mohammad

Poised between Africa, Asia and Europe, the Arabian Peninsula lay at the very heart of the ancient world. Yet no ambitious conqueror had invaded the territory; no ruler had sought to bring it under his domain. All military campaigns had been limited to the area bordering Arabia – Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. As for the Arabian Peninsula, no one had considered it worth fighting for. True, its shores were lapped by three seas, but there was nothing on its land but inhospitable desert and barren mountains.

Mecca was the central township of this land. It was in this “uncultivable valley” that the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad, may peace be upon him, was born. His father, Abdullah Ibn Abdul Muttalib, died a few months before the birth of the Prophet. He was only six years of age when his mother, Amina, also passed away. For two years he was cared for by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and, when he too died, the Prophet’s uncle, Abu Talib, became his guardian. Abu Talib’s demise occurred three years before the emigration to Medina. The Prophet, at the most difficult stage of his life, was left without a guardian.

Nature had endowed the Prophet with a grand personality. Those who saw him in his youth used to remark: “This boy has a great future.” His dignified and impressive personality grew with age. “Those who saw him for the first time were filled with awe, and those who came close to him grew to love him,” Ali once commented. The Prophet’s noble character was undisputed, yet when in his fortieth year, he announced his prophetic mission, people’s attitude to him changed. They poured scorn on his claim to prophethood. “Look at this village boy who reckons he’s in contact with the heavens,” they would say.

His preaching mission extended over a mere twenty-three years. It was during this short time that he brought about a revolution among the Arab tribes, the like of which the world had never seen. Within one hundred years this revolution had vanquished both the Sassanian and the Byzantine Empires. With the fall of these two great empires of the world, Islam annexed the territory extending from Iran and Iraq to Bukhara in the east, while in the west, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and then the whole of North Africa, were conquered by Islam. And the torrent did not halt there. In 711 AD Islam surged forward across the Straits of Gibraltar into the Iberian Peninsula. In 732 a Frankish prince, Charles Martel, arrested the advance of Islam at Tours. Then followed the Crusades, stretching over two centuries, and after the Crusades the horrific onslaughts of the Tartar tribes. But despite these attacks from outside, the Islamic Empire held its own until the 15th century, when, due to infighting among the Muslims themselves, Spain was lost.

It was then the turn of the Turks and the Mughals to be aroused by the spirit of Islam. In 1453 the Turks conquered Constantinople and advanced into Eastern Europe as far as Yugoslavia. A Turkish army remained encamped outside Vienna until 1683. In the 16th century the Mughals established Islamic rule in India and Afghanistan. Over the last thirteen centuries Muslims have spread to every corner of the globe. Close on four dozen countries of Asia and Africa have come to constitute a Muslim world. According to the *World Muslim Gazetteer* (1971) published by the Muatamar Alam Islami, there are 900 million Muslims in the world today.

This was all the result of twenty-three year effort conducted in Arabia under the Prophet's guidance. In this short space of time, the Islamic revolution not only assured itself of a permanent place in human history; it also created a new history of its own. Man does not have it in him to accomplish such a gigantic task; it can only be done by God. The Islamic revolution was truly the work of God. When the Muslims were returning from victory in the Battle of Badr, some people met them in a place called Rauha. They congratulated the Muslims on their victory. "What are you congratulating us for?" Salma Ibn Salama answered. "The enemy were just like tethered camels, and we duly slaughtered them." (*Tahzeeb Seerat Ibn Hisham*, 153)

It seems as if God had made special arrangements for all this beforehand. From the bare Arabian desert He raised up a people of extraordinary tenacity, a people whose characters had been tempered by their environment. They knew only acceptance or denial; for them there was no third alternative. In them were preserved all the natural qualities needed for dedication to a cause. Added to this there was the fact that the two great powers of the day lay on the borders of their country. It was only natural that the mighty empires of Rome and Persia should not take kindly to the emergence of a new power on their doorstep. In their attempt to arrest the rise of Islam, they waged war against the Muslims. In so doing, they forced the Muslims to fight back. This gave the Muslims the chance to conquer the empires of Rome and Persia, whose borders, at that time, extended to the farthest reaches of the known world. There is no doubting the fact that the conquests of Islam were not wars of aggression against others; rather they were a response to aggression from others. They were wars of self-defence and never, in any country of the world, has there been two minds on the justification of such war.

Over and above the political significance of these events was the fact that the Islamic revolution opened out hitherto unexplored opportunities for man. It made God's revealed religion a historical reality, something that it had not been before.

It ushered in the age of the press, ensuring the preservation of the Quran for all time. It brought the age of democracy and freedom of speech to the world, removing all artificial barriers that had obstructed preachers in their call to truth. It made new discoveries possible in the world of science, enabling religious truths to be proved and explained on a rational, intellectual level.

An even more important aspect of this revolution was that, through the Prophet, God showed the world what would happen in the hereafter. His life and mission provided man with a preview of the events of the next world. Those who followed the truth that he brought were made supreme, and that is how they

will remain forever in the hereafter. The wicked, meanwhile, were made to taste the humiliation that they would forever be a prey to in the world to come.

History shows that those who devote their lives to God always appear in a passive and depressed condition, while those devoted to wealth and power always seem to have their way in the world. Such is the sombre evidence of the history of saints and prophets. This state of affairs is quite contrary to reality, for, eventually, God will bestow everlasting honour and glory upon His true servants, while self-worshippers and worshippers of the world forever be assigned to a pit of humiliation and disgrace.

This world is for the trial of man. Here, people have the chance to act as they please. That is why God does not hold anyone in check in this world. But once, at least, by means of the prophet of Islam, God has shown on earth the situation that will prevail in full and permanent form in the next world.

The companions of the Prophet, whose homes were demolished, for whom the earth had become a place of unmitigated oppression, who were robbed of their properties, who were so victimized and terrorized that they lived in constant fear of extermination – these very people were raised to a position of great honour. The Quraish and the Jews, the Romans and the Iranians, the Yemenis and the Ghassanis - those who took pride in their wealth and power – were meanwhile reduced to ignominy and disgrace.

Every prophet who comes from God provides a criterion of divine justice. Through him God announces to man the decisions that He Himself will announce in the next world. But the Prophet of Islam gave such a display of divine justice that it became incorporated in human history. What the world experienced from him became a historical reality, like many other human experiences. Man has seen with his own eyes how God honours His faithful servants and degrades those who rebel against Him. Heaven and hell are realities that will be made manifest in the next world. But man has been given a preliminary glimpse of them in this world so that he may take heed.

What really emerged with the prophethood of Mohammad was the divinity of God Himself. That is why the New Testament foretells of his prophethood as the “Kingdom of God”. There is no doubting the fact that the revolution of the Prophet had great political and strategic implications. But its main importance is as an earthly manifestation of God’s glory, a revelation of divine justice. The revolution of the Prophet Mohammad showed man in advance the realities that will come upon him in stark and absolute form in the hereafter.

A believer’s joy lies in his children being God-fearing

Miqdar says that in the Prophet’s day, there used to be people for and against Islam living in one house. A Muslim would see his father, son and brother following the ways of idolatry. This caused great distress. The faith which God had put in a person’s heart made him sure that if others remain in their present state, they will perish and enter hell fire. For this reason Muslims derived no joy from seeing these non-Muslim relatives. It was about such Muslims that God revealed this verse of the Quran: “Lord, give us joy in our wives and children and make us examples for those who fear you.”

Our Tragedy

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was born into a Christian family. A regular church-goer, he can be said to have been a religious man in every sense of the word. But he is known to the world as a scientist' not as a man of religion. He spent his whole life setting down the results of his research into the solar system, and it is in this capacity that the world has come to know him.

The same is true of most scientists. Most of them have, in their personal lives, been religious men. They were generally born into Christian or Jewish families,' and remained associated with their ancestral religion until the end of their lives.

But the thing that these scientists presented to the world was science, not their ancestral religion. They spent their whole lives delving into the mysteries of science and devoted their energies to handing the results of their endeavours on to the world.

Why is it that these people became famous as scientists, rather than as men of religion? The reason is that religion was something that they had inherited from their ancestors, whereas science came to them as a discovery. One can never develop ardent enthusiasm for one's ancestral inheritance. Something one discovers, on the other 'hand, becomes one's greatest treasure. One feels one cannot survive without presenting it to the world.

Today there are millions of people in the world who regard themselves as religious. In spite of this, we find that religion does not play an active part in their lives. It does not become the focal point of their thinking and concentration. Therefore it has not been possible for such people to become enthusiastic proponents of religion.

The reason for this can be traced to the fact that religion came to them as an inheritance, not as a discovery. If they themselves had discovered the religion they adhered to, they could not but have proclaimed it to the rest of the world. They would have staked their lives for it. But those who receive religion as a legacy, and do not make it a conscious finding of their own, will not be moved by their faith in this manner. They will be like so many other "Newtons" who believe in one religion or the other, while their energies and enthusiasm are directed towards other fields besides religion.

“1984”

The book 1984 was written by George Orwell in 1948. It was an instant success. When George Orwell lay dying one year later, 400,000 copies of his book had been sold. Sales have not slowed since. 1984 has become an essential part of the modern consciousness.

The year 1984 has also become, in the words of Peter Jenkins of The Guardian, “an almost mythical date in human history.” Now that date has arrived, people have taken to comparing the situation postulated by Orwell, with that which exists in the world today. Mrs. Thatcher, for instance, was reported as saying that “Orwell was wrong.” We do not, she asserted, have a totalitarian state of the kind that Orwell predicted.

But the picture that Orwell depicted for 1984 was not meant to be taken literally. It is a symbolic expression of the course that evil in the world of man might take. George Orwell saw ominous trends in the political system of 1948; he projected those trends to 1984, and described the society that might result.

Orwell saw that man is in the middle of a perfect world. Everything in nature is exactly as it ought to be. There is no exploitation, prejudice, tyranny or corruption in the world around man. His own world, however, is fraught with evil. The world of nature, in all its beauty, proclaims that there is a path of perfection that man too can follow. The world of man, in all its corruption, cries out that man has failed to follow that path. The purpose of 1984 is to warn man off cultivating his potential for evil, and cultivate instead the good that is latent in him.

But the pessimistic tone of 1984 shows that Orwell did not see human society reaching a state of perfection in this world. “It is quite possible that man’s major problems will never be solved,” he wrote in 1944, “but it is also unthinkable who is there who dares to look at the world of today and say to himself, ‘It will always be like this.’”

Indeed, if one looks at the world of man, there seems to be no end to the evil that he perpetrates. Yet if one looks at the world around man, its perfection tells one that there must come a time when man also merges with the perfect world around him.

The only way out of this paradox is to accept the coming of another world when reality will be enforced on man, as it is already enforced on the world of nature; when God’s will shall prevail in the world of man, as is already the case in the rest of the world. The only ones who will be fit to inhabit that perfect world will be those who had consciously become a part of it in this world; those who bowed to the will of God when they had the power to rebel.

A New Lease of Life

Eric Morecambe, a famous English television personality and comedian, died on May 28, 1984, of a heart attack. His death occurred just hours after he had told an audience at the Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, how grateful he was for a new lease of life.

For years Eric Morecambe had been haunted by heart disease. This had led him to ease the punishing workload which had previously threatened his health. His daughter, Gail, said after his death: "Dad had made every effort to look after himself, and had vowed to take it easier. He told me he planned to enjoy all the things he worked for and spend more time with his family. We have been cheated." (*The Times*, London, May 29, 1984).

People think that they are being "cheated" by death, but in fact death is the ultimate and most inevitable certainty of our lives. Death cheats no one. It is man that cheats himself: the plans that he should be making for the world after death he makes for this life; only to find that death awaits him, to put paid to all his dreams.

If man were to set his sights on the next eternal world, then he would find there the fulfillment of his heart's desire in full measure; but instead he aims for fulfillment in this world, where there can be no fulfillment in the first place, and even if it is achieved, it can only be for a very short time. If he were to seek reward for his work on earth with God, then God would never let his efforts go wasted; but instead he seeks reward on earth where any reward is scant and, once given, is sure to be taken away again.

Man sees only the world. Death is to him, then, a cruel blow, removing him from the land of his dreams. But if he were to see the world beyond death, he would realize that it is that eternal world of infinite blessings that should be worked for. What "new lease of life" can there be when the spectre of death lies in wait? Those who seek new life will find it only in the world that lies beyond death.

Our Forgotten Legacy

On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's seventieth birthday, Albert Einstein said that future generations would hardly believe that a man like Gandhi actually walked upon this earth. At that time Abraham Pais was investigating the philosophical basis of Einstein's scientific thought. Upon meeting Einstein, he asked him why he had characterized Gandhi's personality in such an extraordinary manner. Einstein's reply to this question was very simple: "Gandhi hated nobody, not even the British."

One commentator on Abraham Pais' book on Einstein has observed: "It helps us to grasp the special quality of mind and heart that Gandhi possessed and which Einstein admired so profoundly. In comparing his personality, we learn something about the morphology of human genius at its highest level – that of prophethood."

(The Times of India, November 13, 1983)

Many great Muslim leaders were contemporaries of Mahatma Gandhi. But Einstein's evaluation of Gandhi could hardly be applied to anyone of them with any certainty. Hatred of western nations has always been the greatest trait of Muslim leaders of this age, whereas Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated how to love one's friends and foes alike.

The prophets taught us to love other nations. They saw all non-Muslims as being in dire need of having the word of God conveyed to them. It was their mission to satisfy that need. Muslims, as heirs to the prophetic mission, should have taught the prophetic lessons of moral rectitude and spiritual elevation through love and compassion towards others. This, the Muslims have failed to do.

Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, provided a living example of brotherly love for all nations. For this reason he was acknowledged throughout the world as an ethical prophet, although not, in actual fact, a prophet.

When the prophet's successors fail to demonstrate the prophetic character, raising barriers of hatred instead of cementing bonds of love, we cannot blame people for taking others as their "prophets". (*"Subtle is the Lord": The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* by Abraham Pais (Clarendon Press, Oxford.)

The Moment of Truth

The power-supply used to be plentiful in the Ivory Coast. The country had at one time been called the "Showcase of Africa" due to its glittering array of houses and shops.

In December 1983, everything suddenly changed. People were forced to eat by candlelight in luxury hotels, while houses and offices were lit by lanterns. Hydro-electric stations which had supplied ninety two percent of the Ivory Coast's electricity were brought to a standstill by a severe drought which reduced the water flowing through the dams to a trickle. The turbines simply stopped running, and the electricity supply fell so low that at times there would be no power for up to 18 hours. Industrial production was reduced by 65%. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators and other gadgets ceased to operate.

For fear of being caught in the lift, many businessmen gave up going to their offices. One commuter explained his situation to a *New York Times* correspondent:

For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here.

This businessman, dwelling in air-conditioned surroundings in the heart of Africa, was living in an artificial world. When the electricity failed him, he realized that in reality things were very different from what he had supposed.

The same is true, on a larger scale, of all mankind. Man considers himself free in the present world. He thinks of everything he has as his own property. But when death comes it will dawn on him, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right; he had taken what was God's to be his own; he was responsible to God for his actions, but he lived under the misapprehension that, whatever he did, he would never be taken to task for it.

14 August 1984

Advice is Better Than Money

A companion of the Prophet, Iban Ibn Sulaim once said: "It is better that your brother should give you a word of wisdom, than that he should give you money; for money will make you go astray, while a wise word will guide you."

Qur'an Translations

On January 5, I was on my way back to Delhi after a journey to Africa. An orientalist joined our flight in Rome, and sat in the seat next to me. His name was Dr. J. Oacek, and he was from the Oriental Department of Charles University, Prague, Czechoslovakia.

In the course of our conversation, Dr. Oacek told me that a Czechoslovakian orientalist had translated the Quran into Czech. According to Dr. Oacek, it was an excellent translation, and had been sold out in the shops within a few weeks of publication.

This is just a small example, from which one can gain an idea of how great the opportunities are for propagating Islam in the present day. There are countless people in the world today who want to study Islam directly from the original sources. But as yet very few of the books – they require are available. There is a special need for the Quran to be translated into every minor and major language of the world, and then published and distributed in every corner of the globe.

But Muslims have shown very little interest in this task. A Muslim from South India once told me that a Christian friend of his had bought a translation of the Quran. When they met later, the Christian told him that Muslims were no match for Christians. "I required a translation of the Quran," he said, "and obtained one with difficulty at so much cost. As for the Christians, if I phone them and tell them that I need Bibles for distribution, then within a few hours 5000 copies will be brought to my office."

Saudi Arabia, and some other Muslim countries, have of late made some efforts in this direction. They have arranged for translations of the Quran to be published and distributed; but their efforts fall far short of the required mark.

The Muslims are bearers of the true religion. The greatest task before them is to communicate God's religion to the whole of mankind. But it is this very task that present-day Muslims are shying away from more than any other.

15 August 1984

Never ask others for anything

“Who will promise me not to ask anybody for anything?” asked the Prophet “I will”, volunteered Sauban. Sauban kept his word: he never asked anybody for anything.

Disadvantage Turned to Advantage

Mahatma Gandhi was very shy by nature. In his book, "*My Experiments with Truth*", he confesses that it was a long time before he managed to shake off his shyness. While studying in London, he joined a vegetarian society. At one of its meetings he was asked to make a speech. He stood up, but was unable to express himself. Finally he brought himself to voice a few words of thanks and sat down. On another occasion, when he was invited to express his ideas on vegetarian food, he set his thoughts down on paper, but was not even able to read out what he himself has written. Someone, however, taking pity on him, read his discourse for him.

After passing his examination in law from London, he started his practice in Bombay. Here again his shyness was a stumbling block. When he appeared before the judge in his first case, he was so nervous that he could not say anything. He had to tell his client that he would not be able to pursue his case, and that he should choose another lawyer for himself.

But, as Gandhiji writes, this apparent disadvantage turned to his advantage:

"My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself a certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen."

Mahatma Gandhi was well-known for his thoughtful and economical manner of speech. But this outstanding trait only came from another trait which few would consider outstanding. Initially his shyness prevented him from speaking in public; later on it made him thoughtful and economical when he spoke.

16 August 1984

God elevates those who humble themselves before Him

Why was Moses chosen for the singular honour of direct communication with God? According to one tradition, it was because “no one had humbled himself before God as Moses did.”

Mukhtasar Tafseer Ibn Kathir, Vol. II, p. 471

Death: A stage in Life

The moment of death is more harsh than any moment we can imagine. All the hardships which cause us distress in this life are nothing compared to the hardship which will one day confront us in the form of death.

Death is a journey towards the most difficult stage of life. It signifies one's entrance – in a state of total powerlessness, destitution and helplessness – to the next world. There is a limit to every hardship we bear on earth; but death will make us enter a world of unlimited hardships and difficulties.

In reality, this is the state we are in on earth. Inherently, we are so weak that we cannot endure even minor discomfort. Even the prick of a needle, a day without food and drink, or a few sleepless nights, are enough to make our whole body tremble. But we are provided with what we need in this world. That is why we have forgotten how helpless we are, and remain ignorant of our real situation.

In this world there is water and sustenance for man; there is air and light in abundance; the forces of nature can be subdued, bringing opportunities for human civilization. If this world were to be taken away from us, then nowhere in space could we make another world like it. There would be nothing for us to do but wander around in darkness.

Man bewails the calamities that strike him on earth. But if he were to realize the intensity of the coming day, he would see that all this is nothing compared to what will come to pass. Comfort and self-respect in this world make man complacent and proud. But if he were to know what was lying in store for him, he would be humble before the Lord. "Lord," he would cry out, "worldly honour and comfort are of no consequence if they do not last through to the next, more abiding stage of life."

Death is not the end of our lives; it is the beginning of a new stage in life. For some that stage will be a pit of torment to outrival all torments; for others it will be joy that exceeds any other.

17 August 1984

Man makes long plans ahead, but he is soon to die

When Abdullah Ibn Masud built himself a house, he asked Umar Ibn Yasir to come and have a look at what he had built. Umar saw the house, and then said to Abdullah Ibn Masud, "You are making long plans ahead, but you will soon die."

Engineering Not Enough

Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan was a world-famous architectural engineer. Born in Dhaka, he obtained his degree in architectural engineering from Calcutta and went to the United States to gain his doctorate in the same subject. He started his practice by taking on a contract to design a 43-storey building in Chicago. His extraordinary brilliance enabled him to make great innovations in his field. The 110-storey Sears Tower in Chicago earned him worldwide fame as a master of modern construction. This highest building in the world was the outcome of his own unconventional concept, now known as tubular design.

Despite his extraordinary success, Dr. Fazlur Rahman was never inwardly satisfied. Mr. K.M. Amladi met him in 1982 in his Chicago office. As Mr. Amladi felicitated him on his success, Dr. Fazlur Rahman listened with an expressionless face. During the conversation he said to Mr. Amladi: "Life is more than engineering."

Dr. Fazlur Rahman died on 27 March 1982 at the early age of 52. He left behind him a new concept in the field of architectural engineering. By developing this concept, the German engineer Robert Gabriel has made plans for a 365-storey building which will stand one mile above the ground. During their conversation, Mr. Amladi asked Dr. Fazlur Rahman whether such a building could be constructed. Dr. Fazlur Rahman replied in the affirmative. Citing this incident Mr. Amladi concludes his article by writing that Europe and America will have such buildings in future, but "the man who laid the foundation for making them possible, alas, will no longer be there to witness them." (*Hindustan Times*, May 9, 1982)

18 August 1984

Thinking most of saving oneself from the punishment of hell

One day the wife of the Prophet, Umme Habiba, prayed in the following words: "May my husband, God's messenger, my father, Abu Sufyan, and my brother Mu'awiya live long!" "Lifespans are measured with God," the Prophet said to her. "When you pray, pray for salvation from hell punishment."

God Helps Those Who Have Lost All for His Sake

The Prophet Abraham was born in the Iraqi town of Ur. When his opponents made life impossible for him there, God commanded him to proceed to the Arab desert. There, in the uninhabited valley of Mecca, he built the House of God. One of the prayers that he uttered on this occasion was this:

‘Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your Sacred House, so that they may observe the prayer. Put in the hearts of men kindness towards them, and provide them with the earth’s fruits, so that they may give thanks. Lord, You have knowledge of all that we hide and all that we reveal: nothing in heaven or earth is hidden from God. ‘

(Quran, 14:38).

There is great symbolic importance attached to this event in the life of Abraham. Here history speaks, telling us what happens to God’s servant who arises to preach the message of truth in all its purity: he is rejected by the conventional order; religious institutions refuse to acknowledge him; he even becomes unappealing to friends and relatives. The cultivated valleys of the world, despite all their fertility, become dry for him. He is forced to take his wife and family to live in a barren land. There, he calls upon his Lord: “Lord,” he says, ‘they have no one to help them but You. The world of man has refused to support them; now You make springs gush forth beneath their feet.’

This is an extremely delicate moment in the history of man. The pulse of the universe stops beating at such a time. The earth, and all heavenly bodies, await new instructions before continuing their course. Man sees a new and unfamiliar happening. “Spring” gush forth in the desert. The blessings of God start descending from above. Winds scatter the words of the preacher among mankind. God, in all His might, comes to the assistance of His servants – the ones who were scorned and deprived of all assistance by people of the world. To preach the pure truth is the most difficult task beneath the heavens; but it is this task that draws God’s succour more than any other. This succour only comes, however, when the preacher of God’s word has fully communicated his message, and people’s persecution of him as a result has reached its climax.

Mechanical Interpretation Not Enough

When India and Pakistan went to war in 1965, it was Pakistan that enjoyed a superior position in armaments. The British-made Patton tanks owned by Pakistan were far more sophisticated than the Indian made Vijayant tanks. Likewise the French-made Sabre jets were capable of striking with greater force than India's home-made gnat planes.

Yet it was India that emerged victorious in this war and Pakistan that was defeated. One of the main reasons for India's victory, according to war analysts, was that the arms used by India were manufactured in their own country, so they knew exactly how to operate them. Whereas Pakistani arms were acquired from other countries; their soldiers were not able to handle these weapons with great expertise.

What is true of military machines applies equally to all machines: their efficiency depends on the efficiency of those who handle them:

Even the most sophisticated technology of warfare is handled ultimately by men engaged in the profession of soldiering. Its use in combat depends, therefore, greatly on their skill, training, morale and ingenuity. The doctrine of the supremacy of the man behind the gun thus remains valid even in this age of push-button wars, though it will surely become inoperative if the unthinkable turns into a reality and a nuclear conflict is unleashed through madness or miscalculation.

(The Times of India, February 2, 1984)

In modern times many are of the view that the universe is simply a soulless, self-automated machine. But the hard facts of modern warfare mentioned above totally contradict such mechanical interpretation. All the machines man has known have always been in need of an operator. On what grounds, then, can the argument that the universe is on the move without an operator be valid? This argument must be dismissed as conjecture, for it has no practical or theoretical argument to support it.

Let us suppose that the universe is a great machine: even then it needs a great mind to operate it. Man has no alternative but to accept God, whether in religious terms as a Creator and Sustainer, or in scientific terms as the operator of the machine.

The Joy of Discovery

The sun is 1,200,000 times the size of our earth, and 93,004,000 miles distant from it. Despite this enormous distance, light and heat from the sun reach us in considerable quantity. By cosmic standards, the sun is a relatively small star; it only appears large to us because of its proximity. Most stars are both larger and more radiant than the sun. Vast globes of heat and light, they are scattered in huge quantities throughout the universe. They have been shining for billions upon billions of years, but their reserves of thermal energy show no signs of being exhausted.

How do stars produce such vast quantities of energy? The astrophysicist Hans Bethe spent years exploring this question. Finally he discovered that the secret lies in the carbon cycle. His research in this field won him the Nobel Prize for physics in 1967.

The day that Hans Bethe made his great scientific discovery was one of great joy for him. His wife, Rose, says that she was with her husband in the New Mexico desert when it happened. It was night, and the stars shone with immense lustre down on the vast, open desert below. She looked up with astonishment at the sky. "Gosh," she exclaimed, "how brightly the stars are shining!" Her husband replied: "Do you realize, just now you are standing next to the only human being who knows why they shine at all?"

Hans Bethe's discovery only answered a minutely partial side of the real question; it did not reach the true crux of the matter. His discovery of the carbon cycle leaves another greater question unanswered: how does this carbon cycle come to operate in stars? A true believer discovers the answer to this question in the form of God, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe. It is He who has invested the stars with this magic property.

How ironical it is that a small discovery should make a scientist lose himself in a spontaneous outburst of feeling, while the far greater discovery that a believer makes – that of God – should create in him no such feeling. Those who really believe in God feel the joy of their discovery. So uncontrollable is their joy that they cannot help expressing it to others. If there are no traces of the joy of discovery, then the discovery itself has yet to be made.

Dawah Power

The Quran conveyed the message to the Prophet, and through him to the whole of the Muslim community, that the Muslims can only earn God's protection on earth if they communicate the word of God:

Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord; if you do not, you will surely fail to convey his message. God will protect you from all men.

(Maida, V 67)

It was the Prophet's determination to convey the word of God to mankind at all costs that protected him at every stage of his life. Take the example of the emigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Madinah. The Holy Prophet had commenced his mission in Mecca. But the people of Mecca became his dire opponents. In the twelve year of his prophethood it appeared as if the history of Islam would end where it had started – in Mecca. Then, astonishingly, opportunities were created in Madinah for the Prophet and his followers to emigrate and establish a base there.

This new hope for Islam was a direct result of the efforts Muslims made in preaching the word of God in Madinah. It is related in biographies of the Prophet that Muslims went to Madinah from Mecca and propagated Islam until "there was not a house belonging to the Ansar (the inhabitants of Madinah) in which there were not Muslim men and women."

Longing for paradise

Bashir says that when the emigrant Muslims arrived in Medina from Mecca, the water of Medina did not suit them. A man of the Bani Ghaffar tribe owned a well which went by the name of Beir Roma. The Muhajirs liked its water, and they used to buy one flask off the owner for one 'Mudd' (a quarter of a sa'a). The Prophet asked the owner to sell him the well in return for one spring in heaven. The owner replied that he and his family had no other means of livelihood, so he could not give it to the Prophet just like that. Uthman heard about this incident, and he bought Beir Roma for 35,000 dirhams. Then he came to the Prophet. "Will I also receive a spring in heaven in return for this well," he asked. "Of course," the Prophet replied. So Uthman donated it to the Muslim public.

Experiencing the Presence of God

One of the three astronauts who traveled in the Apollo 15 American spacecraft was Colonel James Irwin. He later described the magic of that moment, in August 1972, when he set foot on the moon. It was an ecstatic experience, he said, to feel oneself in God's presence, to feel so close to Him that His greatness appeared before one's eyes. Colonel Irwin did not look on his voyage to the moon as a voyage of mere scientific discovery; it had given him new spiritual life as well.

Colonel Irwin's experience was not a unique one, for in truth all that God has created is so wonderful that one has only to gaze upon it to become lost in the wonders of what He has fashioned. The face of the Creator shines continually in the perfection of his creation. But by observing the world around us from an early age we become accustomed to it; we take it so much for granted that we fail to perceive its uniqueness. Wind and water, trees and birds – all the wonders of nature are a mirror of perfection, reflections of the beauty of the Lord. But we are too familiar with them to realize how extraordinary they are. Only in unfamiliar circumstances, such as when a man sets foot on the moon, does one wake up to the wonders of the world; only then does the sight of the spectacles of creation arouse in one an awareness of the presence of the Creator. But we too can experience God's presence, like Colonel Irwin did, just by observing the world around us. The trouble is that people do not look on the world with true wonderment, the way someone on the moon for the first time is awestruck by the spectacle that meets his eye. If we were to look with the same awe on this world, then we would live on earth as if we were in God's presence; we would continually see Him, feel Him, all around us, and act as if we knew that He was watching over us.

When we behold a magnificent machine for the first time, we immediately become aware of the skill of its manufacturer. In the same way, if we observe the world, and ponder over the wonders it contains, then the Creator Himself will appear before us; we will gaze on creation and see there the face of the Lord.

The moon was a new sight for Colonel Irwin. That is why, struck by its magnificence, he was able to experience there the presence of God. In order to see God in His creation, we too have to look at everything – not as old and familiar – but new and exciting; we have to look at things as if we are seeing them for the first time. There is no greater discovery than the discovery of God, no greater realization than to feel Him everywhere. When this realization is awakened, then everything becomes a reflection of His glory. The sunshine will portray His light, the trees His beauty. One will feel His gentle touch in the winds as they caress one's body. As one prostrates oneself before Him, it will be as though one has cast oneself at His feet. God is, indeed, everywhere, but only those who are blessed with vision can behold Him.

24 August 1984

The tragic outcome of a mistaken concept of religion

In July 1982, the Catholic weekly, *18 Pelerin*, set out to discover which values the French considered important in their everyday lives.

Sixteen themes were listed ("money and material success", "solidarity and justice", "love", "sex", and so on). It emerged that "faith and religion" came last on their list of priorities. Half of those questioned, and 60 per cent of the under-35's, attached "little" or "no" importance to those two values.

Le Monde, December 3, 1983